

FAQ: PUBLIC COMMENT FOR DR AS/NZS 5328:2021, FLUSHABLE PRODUCTS

What is a Standard?

Standards are voluntary documents that set out specifications, procedures and guidelines that aim to ensure products, services, and systems are safe, consistent, and reliable.

What is DR AS/NZS 5328:2021, Flushable Products?

DR AS/NZS 5328:2021, Flushable Products is a draft Standard for flushable products. It is currently available for public comment.

The draft Standard sets out a framework, test methods and criteria for determining if products are suitable for disposal by flushing them down a toilet. It also provides guidance and requirements for the labelling of products that are likely to be flushed down the toilet. It excludes toilet paper, liquids and soluble products.

What is a flushable product?

A flushable product is a product considered suitable for disposal through wastewater networks and treatment systems, including onsite treatment systems. It is flushable if it does not materially adversely impact those systems or remain recognisable in effluent leaving them after treatment.

Why do we need a Standard for flushable products?

Wastewater systems are designed to treat waste from toilets and urinals — faeces, urine and toilet paper — along with other waste from bathing, laundry and kitchen activities. Most also treat industrial and commercial discharges containing chemicals.

In recent years, products have been introduced in the marketplace that are claimed to be toilet flushable or are likely to be flushed down the toilet because they are used in bathrooms. Some of these products are not compatible with our wastewater systems and can lead to blockages.

Wastewater systems are important to protect public health, the environment, the health and safety of workers, and sustainable development. When blockages occur, there is a risk that wastewater may spill from the system and create public health and environmental risks along with otherwise unnecessary costs to water utilities and customers.

It's not just an issue here in Australia, internationally UK water utilities say it costs £100 million annually to clear blockages contributed to mainly by wet wipes. Utilities in the US report similar experiences. Here in Australia and New Zealand the issue is costing the urban water industry millions of dollars each year.

Who should comment?

Everyone, in particular water utilities and councils, manufacturers, industry bodies and consumer advocacy groups.

To comment you must register on Standards Australia's website. Once you have logged in, DR AS/NZS 5328:2021, Flushable Products can be found here on the Standards Australia Connect Portal. Public comments must be submitted using Standards Australia's template to be accepted.

What is WSAA's position?

The urban water industry in Australia and New Zealand have been concerned about the contribution of wet wipes products to pipe blockages for some time. WSAA and its members welcome the release of the draft Standard and we encourage all interested parties to comment. We strongly support the pass/fail criteria, clear testing requirements and clear labelling guidelines for consumers outlined in the draft Standard.

WSAA has called for clearer labelling and testing criteria for a long time and was disappointed in 2020 when the Federal Court dismissed the case by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) against Kimberly-Clark Australia Pty Ltd. The case alleged false or misleading representations in relation to 'flushable' wipes they marketed and supplied in Australia. However, we are pleased to see the development of the Standard reach completion and look forward to it being published following the public consultation period.

What does it mean for customers?

The draft Standard includes guidelines for manufacturers to clearly label products to better inform customers whether or not products are suitable for toilet flushing.

If a product meets the Standard and is therefore suitable for flushing, the packaging should display the “flushable” symbol. Packaging for non-flushable products that have a potential to be flushed, should clearly indicate that the product should not be disposed of via the toilet by displaying the “Tidy Man” symbol.

The new labelling could be on products as early as mid next year.

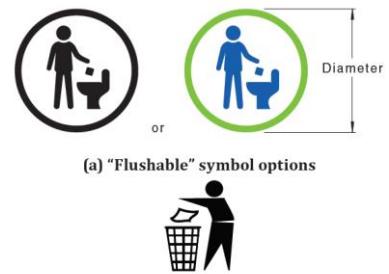


Figure 4.1 — Typical labelling examples

Who was involved in drafting the Standard?

The draft Standard has been developed by a technical committee including manufacturers, water utilities, peak bodies and consumer groups. The members of the technical committee are:

- Australian Food and Grocery Council
- Water Services Association of Australia
- Standards New Zealand (SNZ)
- Consumers Federation of Australia
- Water New Zealand
- Australian Local Government Association
- Australian Water Association
- Water Industry Operators Association
- Accord Australasia Ltd
- Independent Chairperson (Australia)
- New Zealand Plumbers Gasfitters and Drainlayers Board
- New Zealand Food & Grocery Council
- EPA Victoria
- Engineers Australia

What happens next?

Standards Australia has released the draft Standard, DR AS/NZS 5328 Flushable Products for public comment for a period of 9 weeks until 1 November 2021. The public consultation period allows any parties concerned with the application of the proposed Standard to review the draft and submit their comments.

The draft Standard can be altered during this time. It is not an Australian/New Zealand Standard until finally issued by Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand.

The Standard will be voluntary, however we will be encouraging manufacturers of products to comply with the Standard including labelling requirements.